

Hello reading group participants,

Welcome to ARI's reading group on *The Virtue of Selfishness*! My name is Sam, I'm a Junior Fellow at ARI, and I will be leading the discussions.

This group is designed for students and young adults who have read some of Ayn Rand's fiction, but are relatively new to her non-fiction works. We want to provide you the opportunity to engage in guided discussion of her essays with others who are interested in them.

As group leader, my role is to facilitate discussion among all of you. Primarily, I will be asking discussion questions, pointing out important sections of the book, and keeping the conversation on track. From time to time, I will contribute my own thoughts and opinions when I think it will be helpful, but my goal is to facilitate an open and productive discussion among all of you.

With this in mind, we encourage you to be active participants in the conversations, sharing your own ideas, opinions and questions. Try not to worry about making mistakes or saying something "wrong." We want you to be free to explore the ideas and express your own thoughts, with the goal of thinking through ideas together. In my experience, when someone says something that they later change their mind about, it's often a valuable learning opportunity for them and others.

We also don't expect you to agree with everything Ayn Rand says. In fact, some of the richest conversations in these groups start with someone expressing disagreement with some part of an essay. All that we ask is that you come with a genuine interest in Rand's ideas, take the readings seriously, and strive to understand them through constructive conversation.

We also ask that you treat your fellow group members with respect, even when you disagree with them, and that you respect their privacy. These discussions work best when all involved feel comfortable speaking their minds. We do record the group meetings for record-keeping purposes, but we do not make the recordings public.

As we discuss these essays together, we'll sometimes come up with questions or issues that we'd like additional help to sort out. So, occasionally, a philosopher on the ARI staff will join our meetings. These sessions will be an opportunity to ask questions and get to know them.

Before every group meeting, we ask that you at least finish reading the essays assigned to that week. Please note that the sequence of readings does not always follow the order of chapters in the book. *The Virtue of Selfishness* is a connection of essays, each of which largely stands alone, so there are options when deciding how to go through the book. I have arranged the essays into thematic groups and put them in an order that I think is best for our purposes. Note that each week has one essay in bold lettering on the schedule. This is the main essay I think we should focus on that week, but it is not meant to be a limit on what we can talk about—if you want to bring up topics from other essays, you may.

We also ask that you complete a quick written assignment before each session. If you go into the readings with it in mind, this should only take you a few minutes to complete, and it will help facilitate our conversations. Each week, please submit:

1. Your favorite passage from the week's reading.
2. A passage that you don't understand or are inclined to disagree with.
3. A question to ask the group (this can be a question about something you don't understand or a question you think might spark an interesting conversation)

For example:

- My favorite passage: "Since reason is man's basic means of survival, that which is proper to the life of a rational being is the good; that which negates, opposes or destroys it is the evil." (p. 25)
- A challenging passage: "Thus the validation of value judgments is to be achieved by reference to the facts of reality. The fact that a living thing is, determines what it ought to do. So much for the issue of the relation between is and ought." (p. 18)
- My question: Why do you think Ayn Rand spends so much of this essay talking about the ways different kinds of organisms survive?

You can send this via email at sweaver@aynrand.org. There is no deadline, but the earlier you submit, the more likely we'll be able to talk about your questions during the meeting.

I look forward to getting to know you all and diving into Rand's ideas with you! Please don't hesitate to contact me at the email above if you have any questions or concerns.

Best regards,

Sam Weaver
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